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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0531
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3573
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1391
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1258
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1827
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000408

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL/IRF
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: LEADER OF UNREGISTERED RELIGIOUS
GROUP STILL HASSLED IN MARY -- BUT REGISTRATION ADVANCES

Classified By: Charge Richard E. Hoagland for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The leader of an unregistered evangelical religious group in the city of Mary has been banned from traveling outside of Turkmenistan, and his home raided -- and religious material seized -- by security authorities in the middle of a religious meeting. Meanwhile, the Council of Religious Affairs has forwarded his application for registration of a religious group to the Ministry of Justice -- a significant step towards obtaining registration. In this society of great transition and contradiction, it is clear not all authorities are on the same page or transitioning at the same pace. END SUMMARY.

PASTOR BARRED FROM TRAVEL

12. (C) Ilmyrat Nurlyyev and his wife, Maya, lead a branch of the Turkmen Baptist Church in the city of Mary. On March 27, they told visiting EmbOff that security authorities took Ilmyrat off of a plane that was to depart for Minsk on November 11, 2007. In April 2007 -- during the time when Turkmen citizens still needed border permits to visit Dashoguz -- the authorities made him return directly to Mary on the train after arriving in Dashoguz. The Nurlyyevs said the Turkmen Immigration Service told them that the Ministry of National Security (MNB, ex-KGB) refuses to allow Ilmyrat to travel to Ukraine for a friend's wedding in April. They asked if post would intervene so that he could obtain permission. Ilmyrat also asked for post's assistance in inviting a Ukrainian pastor to Turkmenistan.

OSCE IS INVOLVED IN HIS PROTESTS

13. (C) The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) helped Ilmyrat to prepare a January 21 letter for the Turkmen Immigration Service about the status of his freedom to travel. He has not yet received a reply. Ilmyrat has also sent complaint letters to the Prosecutor General regarding the lack of a response to his requests to visit Ukraine. When asked if he wasn't concerned about not being

allowed to return to Turkmenistan, Ilmyrat replied that the MNB had indeed made threats that they would throw him out of the country.

STILL NO CHURCH REGISTRATION...BUT THERE IS MOVEMENT

14. (C) The Nurlyyevs submitted documents necessary for church registration in February 1997 -- with last corrections to the application submitted in June 2007. The Council on Religious Affairs sent a letter to the Nurlyyevs dated March 3 stating that the Council has forwarded the registration application to the Ministry of Justice.

SECURITY AUTHORITIES DISRUPT MEETINGS AND ATTEMPT TO MEDDLE

15. (C) Fifteen people from the mayor's office, MNB, police, and city housing office arrived during a religious meeting at the Nurlyyev's apartment on February 10, demanding to know why the group was holding a meeting in light of its unregistered status. The officials seized 124 DVDs and four VHS cassettes, which they have not yet returned. Following Nurlyyev's complaint letter about this seizure, the mayor's office called him in to tell him that "experts" were reviewing the DVDs. Associates of the family are looking out for them, however, and the Nurlyyevs are grateful that their neighbors did not report them to security authorities. The MNB also visited Maya's boss to try to have her fired, but her boss said that she has been an exemplary employee at the cotton factory for 25 years, and she kept her job. The Nurlyyevs keep church books at home, but keep Russian- and Turkmen-language Bibles in a separate location in case security authorities search their home. They carry on with

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their lives with the knowledge that their home is bugged and that they are followed.

ASPIRATIONS FOR DOING SERVICE IN THE COMMUNITY

16. (C) The Nurlyyevs emphasize that their conversion to Christianity does not mean that they have turned their back on Turkmen culture or people. Noting his previous experience and success in rehabilitating drug addicts in his home, Ilmyrat said that he would like to open a drug rehabilitation center, for which he would not need money from the government -- but he would need a space.

17. (C) COMMENT: Post sees the receipt of the letter from the Council of Religious Affairs which states that Ilmyrat Nurlyyev's application for registration of a religious group has been forwarded to the Ministry of Justice for consideration as encouraging. Nevertheless, the continued harassment of the Nurlyyevs by local officials needs to stop. Turkmenistan is a country in transition on multiple levels, and not all levels are undergoing transition at the same pace. And not all officials -- especially at local levels, who are more accustomed to an enforcer role -- feel comfortable with change. However, brave people like the Nurlyyevs and their friends and colleagues who continue quietly, patiently to insist on their rights are the future of Turkmenistan as a normal country. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND